

**Gunnison sage grouse**  
**(*Centrocercus minimus*)**

**STATUS:** Candidate. Listing warranted as threatened but precluded by higher priority listing actions (65 FR 82310, December 28, 2000). Since this species has never been documented in Arizona, it is not thought to exist in the state.

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** The Gunnison sage grouse is about 2/3 the size of the greater sage grouse (which is approximately 787 mm or 31 inches long), which is North America's largest grouse, with males weighing up to 3.62 kg (8 lbs). Both the Gunnison and the Greater sage grouse are a striking brown, black and white bird, with sharply pointed tail feathers. The Gunnison sage grouse's tail feathers are whiter and more distinct than the greater sage grouse. Males have large mustard-colored throat sacs that are inflated with air during mating displays, surrounded by a collar of bright white feathers. Females are a mottled brown color, perfectly camouflaged for sage grasslands.

**HABITAT:** The Gunnison sage grouse uses a variety of habitats throughout the year but the primary component necessary is *Artemisia* spp. (sagebrush). The most important sagebrushes are subspecies of *A. tridentata* (big sagebrush). Sagebrush is used for hiding and thermal cover as well as a major source of food in the winter. From mid-March to early June males will display on leks (strutting grounds) that are open areas with good visibility (for predator detection) and acoustics (for transmission of male display sounds). After mating, females will select nest sites, typically in relatively tall and dense stands of sagebrush from 183 m (200 yds) to 8 km (5 mi) away from the leks. Nest sites selected have residual grass and forbs that provide additional hiding cover. Hens with chicks remain in sagebrush uplands if hiding cover is adequate and if food consisting of succulent forbs and insects are available. As chicks mature and vegetation in the uplands desiccates, hens will move their broods to wet meadow areas that retain succulent forbs and insects through the summer. Preferred wet meadow areas also contain tall grasses for hiding and at least 150 m (165-yds) wide sagebrush stands along the periphery for hiding and foraging areas. From mid-September into November all sage grouse will use upland areas with 20 percent or greater sagebrush cover and some green forbs.

**RANGE: Historic:** The Gunnison sage grouse's historic range occurred in southwestern Colorado, southwestern Kansas, northwestern Oklahoma, northern New Mexico, and southeastern Utah. Although habitat occurs in Arizona, there are no historical or fossil records of the Gunnison sage grouse in Arizona.

**Current/Potential:** There are currently believed to be seven population areas in Colorado and one population in Utah. The Gunnison Basin breeding population is the largest with up to 3,000 birds. The other 6 populations in Colorado only have 6 to 300 breeding birds, and the Monticello, Utah, population also is only around 120 birds for a total breeding population around 4,000. Trends since at least the 1970s have shown steady declines in the number of males/lek, and one area, Sims Mesa (New Mexico), may have recently been extirpated. The overall population numbers have increased the last 2 to 3 years in the Gunnison Basin; however, this may be attributed to increased survey efforts.

**REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY:** Threats include reduction in habitat by direct habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation from building development, road and utility corridors, fences, energy development, conversion of native habitat to hay or other crop fields, alteration or destruction of wetland and riparian areas, inappropriate livestock management, competition for winter range by big game, and creation of large reservoirs.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** There are no current or historical records of the Gunnison sage grouse in Arizona.

**NOTES:** Although no records of this species exist for the state of Arizona, Arizona contains appropriate habitat, and the species occurs in nearby Monticello, Utah. The recent Federal Notice Candidate Review (66 FR 54808, October 30, 2001) list includes Arizona within the historic range of this candidate species. Thus, we provide this status document to increase awareness of this species.